

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 L-02 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-15 NIC-01 /102 W
----- 067442

P 061915Z MAR 75

FM AMCONSUL CURACAO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2188

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMCONSUL PARAMARIBO

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, NA

SUBJECT: TEACHER'S STRIKE PORTENDS TROUBLE FOR GNA

REFERENCE: CURACAO 0017, 0020

FOR: PALAZZOLO, ARA/CAR

1. SUMMARY:

OVER THE PAST 2 WEEKS WHAT BEGAN AS A RATHER MUNDANE DISAGREEMENT OVER CHANGES IN THE INDEXING SYSTEM FOR PAYING COL (COST OF LIVING) INCREASES TO NA GOVERNMENT WORKERS HAS ESCALATED INTO A MAJOR TEACHERS' STRIKE, WHICH THREATENS TO BECOME A GENERAL STRIKE ON ARUBA AND CURACAO, AND IS CAUSING FRUSTRATION WITHIN THE GNA CENTRAL GOVERNMENT.

DIFFERING VIEWS ON A SETTLEMENT HAVE AGGRAVATED A RIFT BETWEEN THE TWO CURACAO PARTNERS IN THE GNA COALITION. ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, PEACEMAKING ATTEMPTS HAVE BEEN NOTED, BUT REPORTS THAT THE HOTEL WORKERS' UNION (HORECAF) AND OTHERS ARE PREPARED TO STRIKE IN SYMPATHY AUGURS OF ANOTHER

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BLOW TO THE ALREADY STAGGERING NA ECONOMY. END SUMMARY.

2. THE TEACHERS CONFEDERATION OF CURACAO (VLC) AND THE TEACHERS CONFEDERATION OF ARUBA (VLA) HAVE HAD A RUNNING DISPUTE WITH THE PRESENT MINISTER OF EDUCATION, HENDRIK CROES, EVER SINCE THE PRESENT GNA TOOK POWER IN 1973.

ALTHOUGH DEEP DISSENTION HAS SURFACED OVER SUCH MATTERS AS THE VERSION OF PAPIAMENTO TO BE TAUGHT IN THE SCHOOLS AND THE TYPE AND QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL TRAINING FOR TEACHERS, THE PRIME BONE OF CONTENTION HAS BEEN THE TEACHERS' DEMAND FOR AN INSTITUTIONALIZED VOICE IN THE FORMATION OF GNA POLICY TOWARDS EDUCATION. MINISTER CROES HAS ADAMANTLY REFUSED SUCH CONSULTATIONS.

3. IN DECEMBER 1974, THE GNA PROPOSED A GRADUATED INDEXING SYSTEM FOR COL INCREASES. THIS MET INITIAL OPPOSITION AMONG GNA CIVIL SERVANTS WHO WOULD BE FIRST AFFECTED AND THE VLA AND VLC TOOK THE LEAD IN OPPOSING THE PROPOSAL, NICKNAMED "5C". WHEN SUPPORT WANED FOR THEIR POSITION AGAINST THE 5C PROPOSAL AFTER THE GNA ADOPTED A "WAIT-AND-SEE" ATTITUDE, THE SENSITIZED VLA AND VLC RENEWED THEIR DEMANDS FOR CONSULTATION RIGHTS.

4. IN MID FEBRUARY CALLS BY VLC AND VLA FOR STRIKE ACTION IN SUPPORT OF THEIR DEMANDS FOR INCLUSION IN POLICY-MAKING PROCESS RECEIVED LITTLE SUPPORT; A FEW WILDCAT STRIKES, LIMITED TO ISOLATED SCHOOLS, WERE REPORTED. THE GNA, THOUGH PM EVERTSZ AND MINISTER OF EDUCATION CROES WITH CABINET CONCURRENCE, REFUSED TO DEAL WITH THE UNION'S DEMANDS UNTIL ALL STRIKES WERE CALLED OFF. THAT POSITION WAS USED BY TEACHER LEADERS TO ANTAGONIZE MANY OF THE THEN NON-PARTICIPATING TEACHERS AND THE SITUATION ESCALATED TO ONE IN WHICH 90 PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS AND 50 PERCENT OF THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS ON CURACAO AND ARUBA WERE ON STRIKE THE WEEK OF MARCH 3. THE TEACHERS UNIONS MAINTAIN THAT WORK WILL NOT RESUME UNTIL NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEGUN. INFLAMMATORY STATEMENTS ON BOTH SIDES HAVE FURTHER POLARIZED THE ISSUE.

5. STATEN PRESIDENT ELHAGE (FORMER MINISTER OF EDUCATION
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IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING CROES, AND HEAD OF THE PSD PARTY) OFFERED TO MEET WITH THE LEADERSHIP OF THE STRIKING UNIONS AND CRITICIZED PM EVERTSZ (NVP-U) FOR HIS STANCE. EVERTSZ COUNTERED WITH CHARGES OF MEDDLING AND FOR SEVERAL DAYS BOTH PARTIES TRADED EMOTIONAL REMARKS UNTIL FORMER PRIME MINISTER ISA (PSD) INTERVENED TO COOL THE ISSUE AND CONTINUE THE COALITION BETWEEN PSD AND NVP-U WHICH SEEMED ABOUT TO BREAK APART.

6. THESE DEVELOPMENTS NOTWITHSTANDING, THE MILITANT HORECAF (SEE CURACAO'S 0017 AND 0020) AND OTHER UNIONS HAVE ANNOUNCED THEIR READINESS TO LAUNCH A SYMPATHY STRIKE IF THE TEACHERS' DEMANDS ARE NOT MET. WHEREAS THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE TEACHERS STRIKE HAVE, SO FAR, BEEN MINIMAL, IF HORECAF SHOULD JOIN THE TEACHERS IT WOULD THREATEN A SERIOUS BLOW TO THE FALTERING TOURISM INDUSTRY IN CURACAO.

7. IN A COLLATERAL DEVELOPMENT, THE UNION OF WORKMEN IN GOVERNMENT SERVICES (BTG), WHICH INCLUDED GARBAGE COLLECTORS, ROAD CREWS, ETC., CONTINUE THEIR STRIKE IN OPPOSITION TO THE GNA'S 5C PLAN. MOVEMENT TOWARDS NEGOTIATIONS HAS BEEN NOTED AND, SINCE MOST OF THE MEMBERS WOULD RECEIVE THE FULL COL INCREASE, GRADUATED OR NOT, THE STRIKE IS NOT EXPECTED TO EXTEND BEYOND THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS IN SPITE OF VLC PRESSURES TO THE CONTRARY.

8. COMMENT: DETAILS ON THE TRUE IMPACT OF THE TEACHERS' STRIKE ARE NOT CURRENTLY AVAILABLE SINCE SOME SCHOOLS ARE STILL OPEN WITH SKELETON STAFFS. HORECAF'S THREAT MAY OR MAY NOT MATERIALIZE, BUT ITS LEADERSHIP WOULD PROBABLY NOT BALK FROM ITS ATTEMPT TO EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT IF THE VLA AND VLC ARE NOT SATISFIED. THE GNA, UNDER PSD PRESSURE, APPEARS TO BE MODERATING ITS POSITION OF NO NEGOTIATIONS UNTIL WORK RESUMES AND REPORTS ARE THAT NEGOTIATIONS COULD BEGIN OVER THE WEEKEND OF MARCH 8-9 WHEN THE TEACHERS ARE TECHNICALLY NOT ON STRIKE. SUCH A SOLUTION WOULD PREEMPT ANY HORECAF ACTION AND SAVE FACE FOR ALL CONCERNED. THE CLASH BETWEEN ELHAGE (PSD) AND EVERTSZ (NVP-U) CAN BE LARGELY ATTRIBUTED TO HEIGHTENING TENSIONS RESULTING FROM THE PENDING ISLAND COUNCIL ELECTIONS, LESS THAN 2 MONTHS AWAY.

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